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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
EDITORIALS	93-96
What the Coming Hague Conference Ought to Do — For War or for Education — A Lesson of the Earthquake — Annual Meeting of the American Peace Society.	
EDITORIAL NOTES.....	97-99
History Teaching in the Schools — Eighteenth of May — Inter-collegiate Peace Conference — Japan Once More — Massachusetts State Board of Trade — Interparliamentary Group in Congress — Hartford Peace Society — International Law Association.	
BREVITIES	99-100
GENERAL ARTICLES:	
Report of a Committee on the Teaching of History.....	101-107
Letter to the President in Regard to the Coming Pan-American Conference	107-108
Text of the Czar's Invitation to the Second Hague Peace Conference	108-109
The Solidarity of Nations as Shown by the Peace Heroes of Courrières. <i>By Dr. Ernst Richard</i>	109-112
The Cost of a Battleship to Help the Famine-Stricken Japanese, Correspondence. <i>Neutralization</i>	112-113

What the Coming Hague Conference Ought to Do.

The date proposed by the Russian government for the second Hague Conference in the circular to the powers, which we print on another page, proved to be unsatisfactory to all the American governments, on account of the meeting of the Pan-American Conference at Rio Janeiro at that time, the latter half of July. Secretary Root has informed the Czar that any date after September 20 will be agreeable to this government, and with this the other American states are understood to be in accord. The Conference will therefore probably meet about the 1st of October, or a little later.

The insinuation, which we have seen in print, that the latter half of July was proposed in order to keep the South American governments away from the Conference, is unworthy of attention. It is not conceivable that the Russian government, after the courtesy shown it by President Roosevelt in regard to the assembling of the Conference, would have taken a step which, if purposely made, would have been little short of an insult to this country, which has been particularly desirous of having all the countries south of us represented at the next Hague meeting.

The program for the Conference outlined in the Russian circular, while in certain respects what it should be, is on the whole disappointing. It is inferior in general spirit to that prepared for the Conference of 1899. It gives clear evidence of the bad effect of the Manchurian war upon the Russian authorities. It lays so much stress upon certain phases of the laws of war that if accepted by the other powers and adhered to in the deliberations it would take away from the meeting much of its unique and lofty character as a Peace Conference, and convert it into something very like a war congress for the regulation of the details of the barbarous and inhuman art of international dueling. Our government, which took the initiative in proposing the Conference, and will be, therefore, exceptionally responsible for what shall be accomplished by it, ought to see, and doubtless will see, that the deficiencies of the Russian program are fully made up, by insisting on the addition to it of the commanding subjects mentioned in the circular of the State Department sent out in the autumn of 1904.

The Russian circular emphasizes the necessity of giving "a fresh development to the humanitarian principles which served as a basis for the work" of the former Hague Conference. That is an admirable beginning. It also declares that it is important to have participate in the meeting the states which were not represented in the Conference of 1899. That is also admirable, and shows real insight into the growing solidarity of the world. It emphasizes likewise the need of improvement in two or three not unimportant particulars of the Convention for the Pacific Settlement of International Controversies, though it gives no hint of what it has in mind by these improvements, except as to the languages to be used in the proceedings of the Permanent Court.

The rest of the program, something like two-thirds of it, proposes for examination by the Conference, as the "questions which press with particular urgency," certain phases of the laws of war, both land and naval. These are very proper questions for the Conference to deal with. Some of them, as the rights of neutrals, the immunity of private property from capture at sea in time of war, and the bombardment of ports, coast towns, etc., by naval vessels, are of great moment.

But this whole class of topics is of entirely secondary importance in the work which the Conference ought to undertake and which the civilized world